DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 067 970 HE 003 380

AUTHOR O'Connell, William R., Jr.
TITLE Service-Learning as a Southern Strategy for Innovation in Undergraduate Education.
PUB DATE 72
NOTE 10p.; A speech given to a small group discussion session on Innovations in Undergraduate Instruction, 27th National Conference on Higher Education, Chicago, Ill., March 7, 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Community Coordination; *Community Service Programs; *Cooperative Programs; Educational Innovation; Experimental Programs; *Higher Education; *Internship Programs; *Work Study Programs

ABSTRACT

This is a report on the development of a service-learning project conducted in the southern region since 1967. The program provides college students with internships in community agencies to work on social and economic problems. Each student is assigned a project and works under the supervision of a project committee made up of a host agency official, a faculty counselor, and often a technical representative. Each intern must make a final report to his host agency. Federal funding has been used for the service-learning programs, but states also provide financing. Agencies that have used the student interns have been satisfied with their work. (CS)

Gr. 53

ED 067970

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Service-Learning as a Southern Strategy for Innovation in Undergraduate Instruction

by
William R. O'Connell, Jr.
Director of Special Programs
Southern Regional Education Board

Off-campus, experiential education is fast becoming a major and acceptable part of undergraduate education across the country. More and various types of institutions are adding activities outside the classroom and off the campus for many students. In the past eight months there have been at least three national meetings which have included a focus on some aspect of this development. Current interest in providing non-traditional educational opportunities for students has been stimulated largely by recommendations from national bodies such as the Carnegie Commission and the Newman Task Force. Of course, interest on the part of educators is also stimulated by the growing recognition of the possibility that locations away from the institution can provide legitimate learning environments.

Field work, internships, and cooperative education of varying types have long been a part of most professional education, but the current interest is much more encompassing and attention is being turned to developing opportunities for all students, not just those in professional programs, to gain practical experience as a regular part of the undergraduate experience.

Over the past five years, a program has been operated in the Southern region to provide college students opportunities to combine social and economic development internships with their college programs: A major result of this program has been the emergence of a philosophy which can apply to the broader development of off-campus experiences for students. The unique con-

HE 003 380

A speech given to a small group discussion session on Innovations in Undergraduate Instruction, 27th National Conference on Higher Education, Chicago, Ill., March 7, 1972.

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

tribution of this program to the development of innovations in undergraduate instruction is the concept of a balance between service and learning through the relationships among the various components of the internship.

The Development of Service-Learning in the South

Work toward development of service-learning as a strategy for change in higher education began with a community service program which started in Oak Ridge, Tennessee and was further developed and expanded by the Oak Ridge Associated Universities.

The internship program was based on two perspectives. First, students had been used as interns by the Clinch-Powell River Valley local development association during the summers of 1964 and 1965, under the leadership of several Oak Ridge staff members working on a volunteer basis. Second, ORAU with 19 years of experience in administering educational programs for the Atomic Energy Commission involving many colleges and universities was considering the possibility of utilizing this experience in areas other than nuclear science. The Tennessee Valley Authority, which had helped with the first local internships, expressed an interest in expanding that idea. ORAU agreed to undertake building a program and to seek support from other agencies for additional internships. Drawing on experience in administering similar programs for science students and utilizing Oak Ridge administrative and program development procedures, 39 interns were placed in 1966.

To further expand and develop these ideas, the program was moved to the Southern Regional Education Board. This move in 1967 officially expanded the program to the 15 participating SREB states and began the concentrated effort toward stimulating college student involvement off campus.

The expansion of these internships in resource development and their movement to SREB grew out of a concern for relating education to programs of social and economic change, and was based on a tested sample of the potential service of students as well as a growing public acceptance of the pleas of students for more relevant educational experiences.

Internship objectives

Since the formalization of this program, its objectives have remained consistent though some of the elements have been refined through experience. There several dimensions to the program which appear to be somewhat distinct, though they are related through the dynamic relationships of these underlying objectives. The continuing objectives of the program are:

> to give immediate manpower assistance, through the work of students, to agencies concerned with economic and social development;
>
> to provide constructive service opportunities for students seeking to participate in the solution of social and economic problems;
>
> to encourage young people to consider careers and citizen leadership in programs of development and provide a pool of trained personnel for recruitment in public service;
>
> to allow students, agency personnel and faculty to engage in a shared learning experience from which all can benefit;
>
> to provide additional avenues of communication between institutions of higher learning and programs of social and economic development by making the resources of the universities and colleges more accessible to the community and providing a means for relating curriculum, teaching and research to contemporary societal needs.

The internship design has remained consistent since its inception while continually being reviewed and evaluated. The dynamic relationship between the manpower and educational goals gives vitality to the experiences of all involved. The term service-learning has been adopted as best describing this dynamic relationship between performing a useful service for society and the

disciplined interpretation of that experience for an increase in knowledge and in understanding one's self. The coupling of action and reflection has implications for both education and vocation and also is seen as more than a useful technique for performing a task or for educational enrichment. It leads to practice in the development of a life style.

The concept of service, which is promoted in this program, implies an obligation to contribute to the welfare of others or to the community as a means of self-development and self-fulfillment as a human being. It recognizes the need for honest and rational interpretation of these experiences as a disciplined means of increasing understanding of human needs. These two concepts coupled as one unit suggest the possibility of a life style of sensitivity, maturity, commitment and creativity. Service motivated action for meeting society's needs either as a career or through citizen action are encouraged and deliberate, self-directed learning as a nonending process is promoted.

Service-learning has proven to have much to commend it to public and service agencies and to educational institutions. The contributions of students as extra manpower and the learning dimension of practical experience are obvious and are not unique to this internship program. The linking of service and learning, however, as provided in the SREB internship pattern provides experiences not usually found either in student jobs or in the traditional academic field experience programs.

Internship pattern

The SREB internship structure varies somewhat with the type of student, the choice of topic, the character of the host agency and the policies of the participating college or university. However, all follow a basic pattern

which includes common ingredients which seem to maximize the potential for both effective service and effective learning.

Each intern is assigned to an organization carrying out programs related to social or economic development which can effectively utilize the student's ability and contribute to his learning.

Each internship begins with the definition of a project by the host organization, with assistance from program staff and university representatives. The work to be done in the project must be needed by the host organization, be of sufficient scope and level to assure motivation and growth of the student, and be feasible in terms of the limitations of time and the student's experience.

Universities and colleges usually participate in internship projects in their own geographical areas. They provide assistance in defining purposes, scope and methods to be used in completing the chosen project as well as determining educational values. Interns are recruited through participating colleges and begin immediately to share in planning the specific project work and schedule. Faculty counselors for each internship come from the participating institutions.

Each intern has a project committee including a host agency official, a faculty counselor and often a technical representative. The agency official gives the intern guidance, assists him in gaining access to community resources, relates the project to the overall program of the organization, and aids the intern in obtaining any needed services. The university counselor is available to advise on procedures and methods and assists the intern to set and meet standards in carrying out the project and preparing a report. The counselor also assists the intern to review and interpret his experience for educational

and personal development. The technical representative is someone who assists with projects in specialized areas. He assists the intern in identifying technical resources and in properly dealing with technical matters in his report.

Interns are charged with performing a specified task and are given the time, financial support, organizational status, and personnel resources to accomplish the project objectives. They are primarily responsible for determining their own schedules and setting directions. They can call on committee members to assist rather than supervise them. This independence and self-direction is an important feature of the program in stimulating student response, growth and achievement.

Seminars are held for all students which are designed to stress the interrelationships among various activities and problems in development. These gatherings allow interns to share experiences and gain a broader perspective on public issues in social change.

A final report is required of each intern, causing him to organize and articulate his accomplishments, observations, and recommendations. It is a report to the host agency and therefore must be useful as well as meet academic standards. Project reports are normally reproduced in quantity for use by the host organization.

Interns have completed projects in such diverse areas as industrial development, tourism, recreation, conservation, reclamation, forest management, watershed development, manpower development, health, education, training, social services, and municipal management.

Program Expansion

From its informal beginnings with four interns in 1964 through the summer of 1968, the intern project had developed and administered internships for 356

students. Interest from students had grown and agency response was extremely favorable even to the point that many were willing to use their own operating funds to support interns.

SREB decided in 1969 that program decentralization across the Southern region should be the next emphasis. This move served to enlarge the administrative capacity of the program and more importantly to extend and further develop the service-learning concepts. Since 1969, SREB's effort has been devoted to encouraging and assisting the establishment of state level programs. The results have been dramatic in terms of the number of students, institutions and agencies involved. Five states have operated statewide programs and several others are in various stages of program planning. Affiliated state level programs have provided opportunities for more students to participate and for the development of internships with agencies and higher educational institutions in closer association. This closer relationship has brought more commitment from colleges often including the assignment of staff and faculty at institutional expense.

Financial Support

Financial support for these internships continuously has come largely from noneducational agencies. Until decentralization efforts began all costs were paid by grants or contracts from federal agencies to SREB. These funds provided for the payment of all but agency participants as well as the general operating costs. Each student intern receives a stipend for his work and faculty counselors were paid by the program, though currently many faculty participate as part of their regular institutional load. Other costs include student travel--if required by the project and to attend the seminar--and report reproduction.

Support has been provided through the years at varying levels by the Economic Development Administration, Office of Economic Opportunity, Costal Plains Regional Commission, Applachian Regional Commission, Tennessee Valley Authority and the Department of Labor. The Office of Economic Research of EDA however, has been the sustaining agency for this total development. Even in the face of an inability to attract funds from educational agencies or foundations, this agency has provided financial and philosophical support for the refinement of the service-learning concept and is responsible for the program's survival. Parenthetically, it should be noted that officials of this EDA office iniatiated efforts in 1969 to establish similar regional programs across the country in agencies comparable to SREB. These programs began by using the procedures and principles established in the SREB program, though each has now developed its own distinct characteristics.

Beginning with the 1969 efforts to decentralize program operations, principles of cost-sharing were also developed. Many agencies accepting students agreed to pay portions of the interns' stipends, sometimes the travel costs and often the full cost of report reproduction. Some colleges have provided faculty counselors at no cost or on released time with expenses for travel paid by the program. Funds available under federal grants were supplemented through cost-sharing and program decentralization to the extent that there were 500 interns in 1969 as compared with 150 in the summer of 1968 with roughly the same amount of financial support from federal agencies.

Since that time, while operating with even fewer funds available through grants to SREB, the number of students involved has continued to expand with the addition of new sources of funds in each of the affiliated programs and through new arrangements for sharing the costs involved.

Successes and Challenges

The success of these service-learning internships has been largely judged on the basis of enthusiastic response to the idea and testimony of successful experiences. The demand from students for opportunities to participate have outstripped the ability of any program administrator to supply positions. Agencies that once host interns under this plan are anxious to have more, even when required to invest additional program funds. Some colleges have officially established service-learning internships as part of their academic offerings. One such college is Mars Hill in North Carolina which has completely revised its curriculum and reflects earlier extensive participation in this program. Examples of such dramatic response are scarce however.

Several pilot studies have provided evidence that basic beliefs about the program are sound. A sample survey of agencies which had participated in the program showed that participants felt the interns had made definite contributions to the agencies and provided positive service to the communities. In efforts to evaluate the learning dimensions, interns have indicated an increase in understanding community problems, public needs, and the realities that affect solutions to these problems and needs. Through cross-cultural experiences students say they learned a great deal about people very different from themselves and ways they might, or might not work with these fellow members of society. Students and faculty counselors both indicate that generally interns gain new skills in identifying specific, practical problems and independently determining ways to deal with them.

As a strategy for affecting change in the undergraduate curriculum, service-learning in the South has still to provide the academic community with sufficient evidence that these concepts deserve special consideration. Like most suggested innovations, and particularly those in the area of experiential education,

evaluating the learning dimensions is the most complex task. A graduate intern in the North Carolina Internship Office, David Kiel of the School of Public Health, University of North Carolina, is soon to report some preliminary work that may provide a design for further study of these concepts.

A very important aspect of this multi-dimensional program is the opportunity for new institutional-community relationships. With the student as the focus, the faculty member and agency personnel serve in a relationship that seems unique in this community-based educational approach. Working together as partners with the student helps them to develop new insights into the contributions that each can make to the other's work. Faculty often realize potential contributions to the curriculum while agencies may identify a new source of technical assistance. More systematic investigation on this aspect of the program is also needed.

The full extent of the potentials of service-learning seem yet to be realized by most colleges and universities which have been involved. It seems inevitable that off-campus, experiential educational activities are here to stay for the foreseeable future. Whether an institution chooses to adopt this service-learning approach or some other, the concepts developed and tested in this action program offer additional alternatives to the traditional programs of field work, practicum, coop, or work-study. The service-learning model offers another type of off-campus program that seems specifically suited for consideration by the public, non-experimental college or university interested in expanding its program to include opportunities for undergraduates to learn in non-traditional settings.